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June 12, 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

FROM: Frank Scotton, OCO/Eval.

SUBJECT: Long Huu: Follow-up Evaluation

(Note: The following are the main sections of a memo prepared in Saigon May 29, 1967.)

I. Background

During recent weeks, Long Huu has become synonymous with success in the pacification program in Vietnam. The operation on this triangular island in Long An Province has been pointed to as a dramatic example of how the Viet Cong can be "rolled back" without a shot being fired. Reports of the Long Huu operation have been sent to all OCO Provincial Representatives as a model to follow in winning the country for the GVN. The Operation Long Huu report of April 25 tells how various Vietnamese cadre and technical service officials were employed as a civil action team and in conjunction with U.S. officials won Long Huu from the Viet Cong and made it a showpiece for the GVN. So celebrated was this operation that Premier Ky, Deputy Ambassador Porter, and Raymond Burr (TV's Perry Mason) all have visited Long Huu, national news media in the U.S. have given it extensive coverage, and JUSPAO has produced a long illustrated feature for worldwide USIS distribution.

To take a close look at Long Huu, three officers from OCO/PE accompanied by two Vietnamese assistants traveled to the island and spent two days (May 24-25) assessing the situation. (The evaluation team spent two nights on the island.)

II. Security Situation

The Viet Cong can operate freely on the island, visiting almost anyone and any place outside of Ap Cho. Ap Cho is the only really secure hamlet in the village. The net result of the military operation and occupation of Long Huu has been to displace the Viet Cong from part of the island, driving them underground and into neighboring villages. Occasionally, platoons are sent into hamlets other than Ap Cho (primarily Ap Dong and Ap Trung), but these platoons only serve to provide security for themselves.

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If there is one common trait that characterizes all the troops on the island, it is a cautious, defensive attitude. Major Vien, commander of the ARVN battalion, was very candid and honest in his discussion with us. He talked freely about VC activity on the island. Yet, he displayed no enthusiasm or inclination to launch an operation against the communists. Likewise, his troops were very well behaved, but unaggressive.

The Regional Force company displayed this same defensive attitude. This quasi-engineer company is now constructing a defensive outpost in the secure hamlet of Ap Cho. Unfortunately, this will almost certainly reinforce the defensive mentality of the RF and keep them tied down as garrison troops rather than allowing them to become a striking force capable of searching out the VC and securing the rest of the island. (As soon as the fort is complete, a new RF company will replace the present one.)

As for the PF, this unit is hardly a well-prepared military force. The morale is low among the PF. The fact that most of them have not been paid for two months aggravates the situation.

The future security of the village is very much in doubt. Two weeks ago, the ARVN battalion was almost removed from the island. The situation caused panic among the people. Now people are asking themselves, "If ARVN pulls out, what will happen?" With the old French fort unmanned, even the present security situation is uncertain. Outside of Ap Cho, both ARVN and the VC operate. For example, in Ap Tay, the ARVN captured a VC hamlet guerrilla on the 24th of May. While the night before, the Viet Cong captured a local resident from the same hamlet.

III. GVN Activity in Long Huu

The major characteristic of the GVN in Long Huu is its lack of activity. There is no District-level GVN representative permanently located in Long Huu. Major Nghia, the District Chief, visits the island only once a week. There are only four village officials on the island; there are no hamlet officials. The Village Chief, Mr. Chuoc, is uninspiring, undynamic, and for the most part ineffective. Moreover, in a job where the Chief must do a lot of walking over the island, Mr. Chuoc is a cripple. The Deputy Village Chief (whom we did not meet) is reputed to be very promising although mediocre at present. The Police Chief commands a one-man police force (i.e. himself) and the Security Chief is somewhat superfluous with the military and the police chief present.

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In addition to these four officials, the entire village has only one school teacher and one midwife. There are no Service Chiefs in Long Huu. The Agriculture Chief from Can Duoc (the District Capital) comes to the island on a part-time basis. His main contribution so far has been selling rice seed to the villagers at the GVN price. There is no medic on the island. Major Vien, the ARVN battalion commander, has requested the District Chief to send a medic to Long Huu. The District Chief has relayed the request to the Province. So far, there have been no results. The Major said he would be willing to use the ARVN medic for civil purposes, but his unit is short of medical supplies. The absence of a trained medic, is especially distressing since the Viet Cong had their medic give medical attention to the villagers.

There is no information service on the island. The JUSPAO-VIS culture-drama team had to be removed when one of the team members raped a seven-year old girl very shortly after the team's arrival. The VIS service has not been seen since the original civic action team was present on the island right after the GVN took control of Long Huu.

In fact, all the cadre and civic action teams present when the island was first returned to the GVN have not been present on Long Huu for some time. Major Vien had a telling comment on the situation. "At first," he said, "everybody was here: a doctor, service chiefs, the District Chief, an information service, and many other cadre. The celebrities also came. Now that the novelty has worn off, they all have departed. Only we remain."

One of the most discouraging things is that the OCO District Representative, Antonio Quintos, is neither being given proper guidance nor supported properly. What little that has been done on the island has been primarily as a result of his efforts. He has helped to organize a farmers' association, get high-quality rice seed for the farmers, and secure medical services for the village. He is also trying to expand into other activities. But Quintos is only one man and his job is to carry out policy. Considering the fanfare and publicity given this operation, it is surprising that the commanders of OCO and MACV don't pay more attention to the problem.

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Similarly, the children are also an exception to the dominant mood. They are friendly and will run to meet helicopters upon arrival. They will gather around a stranger when he enters the village and sometimes will offer him food. However, one must be careful not to judge the population by the attitudes of the children, for the children's mood is no more typical of the adult mood than Ap Cho is of Long Huu.

In general, the villagers feel that there has been no real change in their lives since the GVN came to power. The people are still waiting to see if the GVN is there to stay.

On the positive side, people are glad the VC are gone because they no longer have to attend political meetings, the VC can no longer force them to do occasional work on trenches, and artillery from the Allies will no longer shoot up their homes. (Every house in hamlets outside of Ap Cho has a bunker to protect the people against attack.)

On the negative side, an adverse reaction was only to be expected when the Village Chief's first and only foray to a hamlet other than the village seat was to collect taxes. Moreover, they are uncertain as to just what the new government will do. People outside of Ap Cho have seen very little of the government. The extent of this uncertainty is evidenced by the fact that no one will become a hamlet chief.

The people's attitude toward ARVN is extremely good. The people report that the soldiers always pay for the food they eat and that they are very well-behaved. They say they will be very sad if the ARVN battalion leaves.

On the other hand, the population's attitude to the Regional Force company is very negative. The people do not like the RF. Their complaints range from RF rude behavior to chicken theft by RF soldiers.

V. Conclusions

It is clear that Long Huu has not yet been won by the GVN. A start has been made, but there is still a long way to go. So far, only the following have been done on the island:

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1. Allied forces have displaced Viet Cong military forces.
2. An ARVN battalion is present on the island.
3. Rice seed has been sold to the people.
4. USAID commodities have been distributed.
5. One school has been reopened.
6. A bewildering array of GVN people have paraded before the people for a couple of weeks and then departed.
7. A few medical supplies and a midwife have been provided to one hamlet.
8. Taxes have been collected by the GVN.

Actually, the battle for Long Huu has just begun. Although the ARVN battalion could occupy part of the island indefinitely, this is hardly desirable. Nor is it feasible, due to the limited number of ARVN battalions.

VI. Recommendations

A combined military-civilian effort must be mounted in this village.

1. An adequate defense force must be created and an intensive advisory effort must be provided. The ideal solution would be for at least one-half of a Special Forces A-team to come to Long Huu to train the RF and PF.
2. The forces should be deployed over the island in a different manner. If the RF insists on digging into defensive positions, there should be several locations for these outposts: one at Ap Huu Loc, one at the French fort, and perhaps a command post at Ap Trung in the center of the island. With patrols moving out from every location, most of the island could be covered. One bright side of the fort concept is the fact that a defensive, permanent outpost will give a sense of security to the people.
3. The people should be told that the GVN is here to stay and that ARVN will stay until the local forces will be ready to defend Long Huu.
4. On the civilian side, there should be a representative from the District to coordinate all the activities. This man should be a personal representative of Major Nghia. He should be intelligent, effective and dynamic.
5. The Service Chiefs from Can Duoc should spend most of their time in Long Huu. After all, except for the postage-stamp size piece of land surrounding the District capital, there is no other secure area in Can Duoc

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outside of Long Huu. Long Huu is the only area where the Service Chiefs can really work.

6. A Census Grievance team should be established. An effort should also be made to get some knowledge of the area and start to operate against the VC infrastructure.

7. Some effort should be made to implement the agricultural development plan made for Long Huu as submitted by Mr. Calvin Mehlert. The special budget made available for Long Huu by the RD ministry should be spent wisely. (See attachment 3)

If these steps are taken, Long Huu will be on the road to pacification. If not, there may be a repetition of the Hoai My story of 1964. Hoai My village in Binh Dinh Province was liberated with fanfare in early 1964 by GVN forces. JUSPAO produced a movie and a booklet on the subject. A few months later, the Viet Cong regained the area.

The United States has stuck its neck out on Long Huu. We have already proclaimed it to be a success. Thus, we have to take the steps that will make Long Huu a success or else risk a crushing loss of face. Rather than ignoring the problem and hoping that it will go away, we should face up to the fact that there are problems on that island. Now we have to solve them.

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